Roy Cooper, Governor

Michael S. Regan, Secretary

Environmental Quality

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Year in review: DEQ works to protect the environment, public health of North Carolinians

RALEIGH – The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) took significant steps to protect the environment and provide leadership and technical support to North Carolina in its year-end review while laying groundwork for the work ahead.

Among the accomplishments of 2017 were chartering the Secretaries' Science Advisory Board (SAB) to examine the science behind unregulated compounds, a thorough review of the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, opposition to a federal plan to open North Carolina's coast to oil drilling and encouraging use of renewable energy for the state's future.

"Keeping North Carolina's environment clean is vital to our continued growth and competitiveness, and we all have a stake in a healthy North Carolina," said DEQ Secretary Michael Regan. "An example is expanding the board's scope from air toxins to new and emerging contaminants like GenX," said DEQ Secretary Michael Regan, who co-leads the SAB with Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Mandy Cohen. "The deep and diverse knowledge of this board, paired with the technical expertise and dedication of our staff, will help us to make science-based decisions to improve environmental conditions for all North Carolina residents."

While DEQ has focused considerable, cross-agency resources on the impact of GenX in the Cape Fear River since June, divisions achieved several other important environmental milestones this year:

- The Statewide Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Master Plan was hailed as a model for states facing significant water infrastructure needs;
- The combined efforts of the Hazardous Waste and Brownfields programs to clean up and revitalize contaminated sites repurposed the areas to encourage economic development; and
- Strong industry engagement programs through the Environmental Stewardship Initiative, that celebrate the voluntary commitment of leading manufacturers that prioritize environmental stewardship.

Other Key Achievements:

Protecting Communities
Secretary Regan renewed emphasis on the importance of ensuring transparency and fairness in all Title VI (nondiscrimination laws and requirements) and environmental justice (EJ) issues within DEQ's purview. The department worked with the U.S.

EPA and EJ stakeholder groups statewide to learn more about and address issues affecting these communities. DEQ has supported listening sessions, individual stakeholder meetings and public hearings on key issues related to coal ash, water and air quality, and the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. Moreover, DEQ has collaborated with variety of commissions, such as the N.C. Commission of Indian Affairs and the Governor's Advisory Council on Hispanic/Latino Affairs, to address Title VI and EJ challenges.

Cleaner Air
"It's Our Air," a new air quality curriculum designed for North Carolina high school students, was introduced on April 26 to mark Earth Day. The free course provides a series of activities and videos designed to help students gain a better understanding of the science and technology used to explain, monitor, predict and protect air quality. The Division of Air Quality (DAQ) provided hands-on training to teachers across the state to help them incorporate "It's Our Air" into lesson plans, with more workshops planned for 2018.

In November, Governor Roy Cooper named DAQ as the lead agency to manage the state's $92 million share of the national Volkswagen Settlement. Public input will be received through Sunday, Dec. 31, on how the state should invest in projects that will significantly reduce pollution from diesel sources. Public meetings will follow, with a mitigation plan to be finalized and projects chosen later in the year.

Additionally, North Carolina was designated as attaining the strict federal standard for ozone in all 100 counties. Unhealthy ozone levels have declined since the early 2000s through partnerships with industry, local governments and organizations focused on curbing air pollution statewide. This relationship shows how a robust economy and healthy environment can thrive at the same time, Regan said.

Protecting Our Coast
The Division of Coastal Management (DCM) awarded more than $1.6 million to 14 local governments to improve public access to coastal beaches and waters for FY2017-18. The awards ranged from $13,000 to $300,000 and included projects such as boardwalks, public restrooms, kayak launches, fishing pier and parking improvements, and repair of the Yaupon Pier in Oak Island.

DCM also developed a Statewide Programmatic Biological Opinion in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that will streamline a portion of the permitting process for beach nourishment projects along North Carolina's oceanfront, saving local governments time and costs.

Hurricane Matthew Recovery
DCM awarded $100,000 in grants to seven coastal municipalities for local planning and management projects that will help them prepare for hurricanes, storms and growth for the 2017-18 fiscal year. Projects funded include flooding mitigation planning, flooding vulnerability, stormwater drainage and updates to land use plan natural hazard policies. Of note is a grant to Hyde County to assist in the development a watershed restoration plan to address drainage issues and improve water quality in Lake Mattamuskeet.

The Dam Safety program of the Division of Energy, Mineral and Land Resources (DEMLR) responded to and inspected more than 400 dams in the two-week period following Hurricane Matthew in October 2016. DEMLR took immediate action on multiple dams that were considered a high threat or danger to the public and key infrastructure, including an enforcement action requiring the owners of Woodlake Dam make required repairs. When the owners failed to comply, DEMLR initiated a breaching of the dam using $1.3 million in Disaster Recovery funds to protect the public downstream.

The Division of Water Infrastructure provided over $4.85 million in Disaster Recovery funding to communities whose water infrastructure systems were significantly damaged by Hurricane Matthew. Examples of support include over $1.8 million to the Town of Fair Bluff for pump station flood resiliency improvements and moving a drinking water well out of the flood plain, and $1 million to the Town of Wadesboro for the Burns Street Basin sewer rehabilitation.

Stormwater Management
DEMLR began implementing new and updated stormwater management rules on Jan.1 following an extensive stakeholder process that included regulators, developers, academia and environmental groups. The new rules simplify the permitting process and provide greater flexibility while maintaining water quality protection measures.

Celebrating Stewardship

The Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) recognized five more Stewards in the program, bringing the total number of participants to 27. ESI's mission is to assist organizations in reducing their environmental impacts beyond regulatory requirements, and serving as role models for other high achieving operations.

The Recycling and Materials Management Section of the Division of Environmental Assistance and Consumer Services (DEACS) provided more than $1.3 million in recycling grants to local governments that support public and private sector recycling activity. Projects modernized curbside recycling and diverted materials from the waste stream to become raw materials for business and industry, in turn reducing dependence on disposal, saving landfill space and avoiding the cost of disposal. Grants also helped counties to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of recycling services at solid waste convenience centers in rural areas, advance the recovery and recycling of mercury-containing products, and abate abandoned manufactured homes.

The Waste Reduction Partners (WRP) team provided on-site waste reductions and energy efficiency assessments for 164 clients across 45 counties, helping businesses and institutions save $1.54 million in FY2017. The WRP also worked with 75 clients to divert more than 9,421 tons of waste from landfills. The value to these customers, including disposal management savings and material revenues, is estimated at $556,000. WRP also provided water efficiency assessments for large water customers in the City of Asheville, saving customers 15.3 million gallons of water and eliminating $72,235 in operating costs.

Supporting Fisheries
The Artificial Reefs Program worked with local non-governmental organizations to create oyster habitat and enhance fishing opportunities. This includes the Swan Island Oyster Sanctuary near the mouth of the Neuse River, the five-acre Artificial Reef-491 in the Cape Fear River near Carolina Beach State Park, and the Artificial Reef-430 off Oak Island.

Marine Fisheries processed a significant increase in the number of shellfish lease applications as in previous years. Between 2012 and 2015, the division averaged receiving nine applications; since 2016, it has received more than 100. The increase in applications is due, in part, to development of new, highly efficient culture methods and streamlined regulatory requirements.

Waste Management
During FY2016-17, the Hazardous Waste program's actions ensured the safe management of an estimated 95,915 gallons and six tons of hazardous waste, 1,810 gallons and 7.36 tons of non-hazardous waste, 1,275 gallons of used oil, and 30,384 pounds of universal waste that otherwise may have been mismanaged. These actions also ensured that more than 1,896 individuals (mostly staff at affected facilities) that could have been adversely affected were protected.

During the same period, and celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Brownfields Program, the division completed 55 brownfields agreements. These projects represent 1,186 abandoned, idled or underused properties put back into safe reuse, thousands of jobs created, and more than $1.95 billion in estimated capital investment in brownfields redevelopment.

Awards and Recognition
DEQ received the EPA's Excellence in State Engagement Supporting Reuse award for the agency's ongoing commitment to support redevelopment and community revitalization. The honor recognizes DEQ's role in the cleanup and reuse planning processes at the Ecusta Mill Superfund site in Pisgah Forest; for facilitating the redevelopment of the Martin-Marietta, Sodyeco Inc. Superfund site near Charlotte into ReVenture Park; and for promoting redevelopment at contaminated sites through Geographic Information Systems designed to provide information for potential developers on site use limitations.

The Water Finance Research Foundation named "North Carolina's Statewide Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Master Plan: The Road to Viability" the Best State Level Water Infrastructure Master Plan in the country, helping to manage the aging water infrastructure crisis and sustainable infrastructure management and funding concerns. Also hailed by the EPA for its innovative and strategic approach in dealing with the state's significant water infrastructure needs, the report has been viewed as a model by other states. Implementation continues through coordination and meetings with local elected officials, regional Councils of Government, and other organizations.

The Public Water Supply section of the Division of Water Resources (DWR) awarded 49 water treatment plants the prestigious N.C. Area Wide Optimization Award, which is a state effort to enhance the performance of existing surface water treatment facilities. Awards are given each year to water systems that demonstrate outstanding turbidity removal, a key test of drinking water quality. While all drinking water systems must meet strict state and federal drinking water standards, these systems met performance goals that are significantly more stringent. During 2016, nearly 3 million North Carolina residents were served by these award-winning plants. The award winners included Asheville, Charlotte, Morganton, Boone, Cary, Lincolnton and

Greenville, among others.

Water Infrastructure

The division funded $8.2 million in asset inventory and assessment grants, helping North Carolina's utilities proactively assess their water infrastructure and actively plan for replacement and rehabilitation before failure of their systems can occur. This is an important factor in maintaining water quality, protecting public health and the environment, and promoting economic development.

Cleaner Water

DWR's Water Sciences Laboratory secured a federal grant to expand its research and partnerships to address 1,4 dioxane so the emerging contaminant of concern could be studied in several basins other than the Cape Fear River basin.

DWR staff secured a grant to conduct additional testing for harmful algal blooms so the state is better equipped to alert the public to avoid the blooms when they are forming. Some naturally occurring algal blooms often grow in fresh water lakes, ponds and canals and use the sun to grow large. Such blooms can be harmful to human health, pets, livestock and aquatic plants.

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